

Grant Will Allow for UR Scientific Study to Diagnose River and Lake Ontario Health

Rochester, NY – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) today joined with the Obama Administration's leading expert on the Great Lakes to announce a \$308,000 grant for scientists from the University of Rochester to determine if the environmental health of the Genesee River embayment area, currently deemed a federal "Area of Concern," has improved as local scientists have suspected. The study will be significant for charting progress in restoring the Areas of Concern.

By using tissue samples from sturgeon, a freshwater, bottom-feeding fish that can grow up to 18 feet long, scientists from the University of Rochester's School of Medicine and Dentistry will be able to determine the health of the Genesee River embayment area. Starting in 2003, 1,900 sturgeon were reintroduced into the embayment area and tagged for future tracking. Historically abundant in Lake Ontario, this large, primitive fish has virtually disappeared due to over fishing and habitat degradation. The study announced today is non lethal to the endangered fish.

"I've said for a long time that we have the best and brightest here in Rochester and the scientists with me today are proof of that," said Congresswoman Slaughter. "By studying the tissue of these mammoth fish, we can determine, as we've suspected for some time now, that the Genesee River is indeed cleaner and healthier. And we can do it all with the brainpower here in Rochester. I'm delighted to be here with my friend Cam Davis because I know he shares my belief that the Great Lakes, as the largest source of freshwater in the world, are an international treasure."

[Cameron Davis](#), the Environmental Protection Agency's Senior Advisor to the Administrator and Great Lakes' strongest Administration advocate, joined Slaughter for today's announcement along with officials from the City and University of Rochester.

"This investment will help fulfill our commitment for a new Great Lakes standard of care: our work is no longer about limiting damage and minimizing harm to the ecosystem. It is about proactively working to make the Great Lakes healthier for the next generation," said Cameron Davis, EPA's Senior Advisor on the Great Lakes, today in Rochester.

With the funding announced today, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry veterinarians Jeff Wyatt and Louis DiVincenti, along with U.S. Geological Survey ecologist Dawn Dittman, will monitor the health of the Genesee River by sampling the blood and tissue of the sturgeon and measuring the level of pollutants, like mercury, silver and other industrial byproducts, that tend to accumulate in fish. By comparing the tissue of Genesee River sturgeon to fish from non-polluted waterways, the scientists will be able to determine the health of one of the [EPA's most watched local areas](#) .

"Our hope is that contaminant levels in the Genesee River sturgeon will be no different than fish living in pristine waters, showing that efforts to clean up areas of concern in the Great Lakes are moving in the right direction," said Wyatt, professor and chair of the Department of Comparative Medicine at the University of Rochester Medical Center. "We are very happy to be a part of this important initiative. The Genesee River is of great historical significance to the Rochester area, and in addition to providing critical data on the health of the River, we want to promote community pride in Rochester's waterways."

"I want to thank Congresswoman Slaughter for her leadership role in securing this grant. She has always been a strong advocate for the Great Lakes," said Mayor Thomas S. Richards. "Our waterways and Lake Ontario are a tremendous resource. We owe it to future generations to preserve and enhance these waters. I am hopeful this study will show that we have been moving in that direction."

The \$308,000 federal grant comes from funding from the [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#) , a multi-agency program with the goals of restoring and protecting the Great Lakes. In 2010, the Obama Administration released its Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan, prioritize the Genesee River for restoration.

Funding for the study of sturgeon tissue is one of 11 GLRI grants awarded in New York State this year. In FY 2011, the GLRI was appropriated \$300 million by Congress.

Slaughter is a Co-Chair of the Bicameral Great Lakes Task Force, a bicameral, bipartisan group of lawmakers dedicated to improving the economic and environmental health of the Great Lakes. More on Slaughter's work to protect the Great Lakes is [available here](#).